



**CEPPS/IRI QATAR Quarterly Report: April 1, 2005 to June 30, 2005**

**Support for Democratic Political Reform**

**Agreement Number DGC-A-00-01-00004-00**

**Project Dates: August 1, 2004 to December 31, 2005**

**Total Budget: \$750,000      Expenses to Date: \$171,180**

**Project # 7094**

## **I. SUMMARY**

Consultation and technical assistance was provided to the Supreme Education Council, Qatar University, the Prince's Youth Forum and the Majlis A'Shura during the reporting period, laying the foundation for long-term capacity strengthening activities and partnerships. Additionally, throughout April, May and June two training sessions per month were delivered to the Supreme Education Council. IRI continues to meet with numerous parties in Qatar who are interested in partnering with us to conduct training in capacity building, journalism, leadership, and effective communications techniques.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

When Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani overthrew his father in 1995, Qatar had fallen into a stagnant period of inattentive and disinterested leadership. Even with the wealth and good fortune of oil, Qatar was falling rapidly behind. Driven by recognition that the aging Emir was no longer fit to rule the state, a council of the ruling family agreed that the crown prince would be more aptly suited to take over the realm. Hamad bin Khalifa had been assigned the portfolio of Defense Minister, but proved his leadership qualities by effectively guiding the country from behind the scenes. After consulting with the major tribes and influential families, the young Emir deposed his father (who was traveling in Switzerland at the time) and immediately set the stage for a new era in Qatar's growth and progress.

Upon assuming his new position, the Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani announced his intention of turning the country into a constitutional monarchy and set in motion a series of reforms to give weight to his words. Almost immediately upon assuming office, the Emir ended government censorship of the press, announced his intention to hold general elections for the Central Municipal Council, and granted universal suffrage to men and women over the age of 18. His bold moves made waves in the region, and set in motion an impetus for change that deeply surprised his neighbors and the Qatari population.

In 1997, the Emir confirmed his commitment to holding municipal elections and extended the right to run and vote in the elections to women. Considerable enthusiasm emerged for elections for the Municipal Council, held two years later in March 1999, during which 228 candidates competed for the 29 seats of the council. The momentous event marked the first time free elections were held in Qatar and the first time that women were allowed to vote and run for office. The elections also sparked intellectual debate among a number of Qataris regarding the meaning of democracy and democratic governance. Seminars and lectures were also held to discuss the general concept behind popular participation in government.

Beyond the Municipal Council, the Emir decided to take the reform process one step further by calling for the establishment of a permanent constitution and an elected parliament. The most significant development came in 1999 with an Emiri decree to establish a high level committee to draft a new permanent constitution, which had not been amended since 1972. The passage of a constitution by referendum in April 2003 marks one of the boldest attempts to date in the Gulf to articulate the powers and responsibilities of government and the governed in a systemic fashion.

While explicitly codifying Executive power and the transfer of power in the hands of the Al-Thani family, the Qatari constitution is equally noteworthy for the emphasis it places on issues of equality, freedom and opportunity to all citizens, including the right to vote and run in elections for all men and women. The constitution outlines the responsibility of the state toward its citizens, including: providing medical care, promoting education, protecting younger generations from corruption or exploitation, and encouraging the arts and scientific research. In line with its important economic role, the constitution assures the freedom of economic activity and respect for personal property, but also mandates that the relationship between employers and employees adhere to ideals of social justice.

Perhaps the most significant element of the new constitution is the mandate for an elected Advisory Council (or Majles A'Shura), in which thirty members will be elected and fifteen appointed by the Emir. Until now, the 35-member Advisory Council outlined in the 1972 constitution has been a nominal legislative body, with its members appointed by the Emir and lacking any real independence or authority. In a remarkable change, the new Majles will have the authority to propose law, amend and approve budgets, monitor the performance of ministers and overrule certain Emiri decisions by a two-thirds majority.

The Emir's call for elections with the Municipal and Advisory council has also been echoed in other aspects of public life. The government has encouraged replacing appointed officials with elected ones in some bodies attached to the ministries. Particularly noteworthy was the election for the Board of the Qatar Chamber of Commerce in 1998, when 3,700 Qatari businessmen voted to elect the 17 member board. In a similar vein, the deputy assistant minister of education introduced the idea of democracy within the university by calling for elected student bodies to help shape their own institutions.

While considerable excitement and attention ensued from Qatar's first experiment with elections, the relevance of the Municipal council should not be overstated, nor the public's interest in such elected bodies. Out of less than 200,000 citizens, only 22,225 registered to vote in the 1999

elections, and even fewer actually cast a ballot. In fact, turnout for registration was so low that the government extended the deadline by a week in an effort to encourage more Qataris to register. The elected municipal council is not an independent body, but rather falls under the authority of the Minister of Municipal Affairs who can dissolve the council at will. The council's role is advisory in nature and has no legislative power or ability to challenge ministers or the Emir on significant policy issues. Given the hamstrung nature of the council, most Qataris question the council's ability to have any meaningful role in governing.

By the same token, while the constitutional referendum was a watershed event in the history of Qatar, and the changes are significant within the context of the Gulf States, one must be careful not to overstate its implication for true democratization and popular representation by the people. The constitution recognizes Shari'a as the primary basis for legislation, legitimizes hereditary transfer of power for the executive and mandates a "Ruling Family Council" to be appointed by the Emir from within the ruling family to make any necessary decisions about succession. The power of the Advisory Council is fairly limited and can be dissolved at any time by the Emir. The Council has the right to override objections from the Emir regarding a law in question, but the Emir has ultimate authority and can stop implementation of the law for an indeterminate amount of time. The constitution does not allow for the formation of political parties, and the right to assembly and freedom to establish societies is qualified.

It is clear from the Emir's pronouncements that the municipal council elections were intended to be the forerunner of the more consequential Parliamentary elections, likely to be scheduled in 2005. However, given the weak track record of the Municipal Council, Qatari citizens can expect little from an elected Parliament. With its tiny population and national wealth sufficient to sustain a rentier system of rule, the absence of grassroots demand for democratic political reform is a particularly noteworthy feature of the Qatari political environment.

With elections anticipated sometime in 2005, the Majles could offer Qatari citizens a broad range of new opportunities to take part in decision-making and demand government accountability. The challenge is thus broadening public interest and input in the political and social reforms being contemplated in Qatar by supporting initiatives currently underway and identifying methods to deepen and further democratic reform at a popular level. This approach must take into consideration the cultural and societal limitations unique to the Qatari experience while concurrently adhering to principles that provide a basis for genuine and meaningful political reform.

### **III. ACTIVITIES**

The Qatari government has been slow to respond to IRI's request for authorization to establish an official office, Resident Country Director Elan Fabbri is in country but is still required to leave monthly for visa purposes. With IRI's request for official authorizations still pending the Institute cannot enter into contractual agreements, sign leases, or conduct sustained multi-faceted training. Elections for Qatar's advisory Council originally expected to take place in Autumn 2005, may not be held until well into 2006, raising the possibility of further delays of IRI's registration request. IRI is currently examining alternatives that will both allow the Institute to

have a permanent active presence in the Gulf, and enable IRI to put into place the administrative support structure necessary.

### *Capacity Building*

In April, IRI delivered two communications trainings for the Supreme Education Council (SEC). The First session covered writing for the media in which they reviewed targeting and message basics, the specifics of press releases, advisories backgrounders, Q&A and use of the web. In May IRI conducted two more sessions including a further discussion of media training. As a result of these sessions the SEC has decided to implement school boards, which will be elected by parents in the initial implementation phase, but that will in part, convert to publicly elected bodies. The two June meetings addressed crisis communications, which was extended due to its popularity, and a second on writing for the web.

IRI's work with the Majles A'Shura is still impeded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs failure to grant the necessary authorization. The Majles looks forward to working with us as staff continues to pursue this approval through numerous channels.

In May IRI staff met with former Qatari Air Force Commander, Brigadier General al-Mahmoud who is attempting to launch an independent think-tank aimed at providing public relations for the military, as well as to help members of the military better integrate into society, rather than remain isolated. They are examining British and US treatment of military personnel in an attempt to modernize their military structure. IRI staff has offered to share academic articles/materials related to forming an organization, how to develop vision/mission, etc. in order to aid them in this objective. It is hoped that civil-military relations might also form a core of their organizations focus. IRI is conducting ongoing discussions in with the general on that topic.

Discussions with the editor of AlJazeera.net in Qatar continue as we prepare to assist them with journalist training. The program would include capacity building with local journalists, starting with training to promote investigative journalism by discussing research techniques: what is it, how is it conducted, how is it interpreted and how can/should it be used in reporting.

The Emir and Sheikha Moza's fourth son, Mohammed, expressed an interest in convening community forums/town halls in order to provide a venue for people to debate. IRI staff has suggested this initiative become part of a broader process based on our Jordan youth program model. The Prince's youth program demonstrates their interest in this concept and IRI staff is currently serving addressing how to progress with this project having met with the committee numerous times in May and June. Working with the Qatar Foundation to facilitate the Qatar Youth Forum focus group, IRI staff was present at the first meeting wherein participants exhibited their enthusiasm for the program and identified such key issues as education, naturalization/citizenship, gender, social issues. IRI continues to seek other partners for a more comprehensive Youth Program.

IRI staff continues to provide support to the President and External Affairs Director of Qatar University in planning several leadership/communications training sessions for senior staff/deans during the upcoming fall semester.

## IV. RESULTS

**Enhancing the development of an independent, participatory and accountable civil society that can engage in and deepen Qatar’s domestic political reforms and that can meaningfully participate in the country’s electoral process.**

**Result 1:** Enhance citizens’ awareness of their rights and responsibilities, the rights and responsibilities of other actors in a democratic state, and the specific attributes of Qatar’s political processes.

### Indicators

1. Training evaluations and/or other forms of survey based feedback will demonstrate participant knowledge of basic democratic principles, citizen responsibility, the role of government and electoral processes.

*No activities to report this period*

2. In partnership with local entities, IRI will produce and distribute voter “process” cards and other materials that voters will use in advance of and take to the polls with them on election day to explain the process.

*No activities to report this period*

**Result 2:** Encourage citizens to understand and meaningfully participate in the election for an Advisory Council.

### Indicators

1. Increased numbers of voters will understand the importance of multiple forms of civic participation, including at the ballot box through the conduct of broad-based and targeted voter education and Get-Out-the-Vote activities;

*No activities to report this period*

2. Qatari candidates and campaign managers will develop written plans to implement effective electoral campaigns.

*A proposed training plan and agenda has been developed in consultation with the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and is expected to be authorized in February for a March start date.*

**Result 3:** Improve the development of professional, transparent and accountable organizations in Qatari civil society.

## Indicators

1. Civil society organizations and NGOs will improve organizational capacity and constituencies at the national and local levels through development of written strategic plans, program proposals and budgets.

*In March IRI delivered two communications trainings for the Supreme Education Council.*

*IRI worked in cooperation with Qatar University, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and the Supreme Education Council to develop program and communications proposals and plans, improving the professional standards of the entities involved.*

2. An informal network of civil society organizations and NGOs dedicated to increasing knowledge of various forms of civic participation will be formed.

*The network will be pursued concurrent to the capacity building program offered in partnership with Qatar University.*

## Result 4: Enhance understanding of citizens needs and demands

### Indicators

1. Emerging civil society will develop an understanding of methods and applications of survey research on public perceptions of political reform, society, economics and other issues;

*Informal conversations have created a curiosity, leading to confidential discussions between senior members of the ruling family to introduce a research/policy institute at Qatar University.*

2. Capacity and desire for survey research will be developed through the provision of training workshops, leading to its use in program development and assessment.

*All scheduled training programs incorporate an introduction to survey research.*